

"GOD'S LANDMARK PRESERVERS"

Proverbs 22:28 "Remove not the ancient landmarks, which thy fathers have set".

Introduction:

On Sunday, January 30, 1938, a special sermon was preached at the morning church service on the topic "God's Landmark Preservers", (the text being Proverbs 22:28) by the pastor, Rev. John H.P. Strome. This sermon marked the close of the Centennial Year Celebration in Central Presbyterian Church of Newark, N.J. and the 101st Anniversary of the church. One year previous, on January 31, 1937, the Rev. Robert Scott Inglis, D.D. had preached in the church on the actual 100rdth anniversary of the church's founding. The church was without a regular pastor at that time, the Rev. Loyal Y. Graham, Jr. having died on December 20, 1936 while still in his pastorate.

Tonight, January 29, 1939, the sermon is meant in one respect to be a repetition of the sermon preached a year ago, but it also contains some new materials and a somewhat different application. In the sermon of 1938 the pastor gave a brief history of the church and then called attention to certain "landmarks" in our present life, viz., the Church, the Sabbath and the Bible which we do well to preserve and must not remove. Tonight, the historical element of the sermon is taken back to an earlier period and the application of the sermon relates to the future and what we should do, that Central Church landmark remain ~~be suggested~~. On next Tuesday, January 31, 1939 Central Presbyterian Church will be officially 102 years old, the church having been founded on January 31, 1837.

It will be wise for us to consider the history and affairs of our church from three angles. First, let us see some of the forces that were at work to bring about the formation of this church. Second, let us review in outline form its actual history up to the present. Third, let us think for a few moments about the future and what it may be that God desires for us to do. (Incidentally, it may be remarked that in the New Jersey Historical Society Library, located at 230 Broadway in Newark, excellent records and histories are preserved.) The following volumes are to be found there and are very helpful.

"History of Essex and Hudson Counties, New Jersey"
Compiled by William H. Shaw--Published in 1884.

"A History of Newark"
Embracing Practically 2½ Centuries--1666-1913--In Three Volumes
Volume II deals with Church History and was written by Rev. Joseph Bolson
Lewis Historical Publishing Co.--New York-Chicago, 1913.

"Forty Years Retrospect"--A Historical Discourse--Delivered in the Central Presbyterian Church, Newark, N.J., Sabbath Morning, January 28, 1877--by the pastor, Rev. William T. Pindley, D.D.
Newark, N.J.--Martin R. Dennis & Co. 1877.

I. First, let us review some of the forces that preceded the organization of Central Presbyterian Church.

The City of Newark, N.J. traces its beginnings to the arrival of a group of settlers from the country now known as Connecticut in the year 1666. These people were religious people. They came to this new and

wilderness area because of certain religious principles which they held dear. They had originally been the inhabitants of the New Haven Colony, which at that time had been taken over by Connecticut. ~~Now~~ The members of the New Haven Colony held to the tenet that no one could be a citizen, no one could vote, unless he was a member of the Congregational Church. But the larger Colony of Connecticut did not share this view. It permitted others, many non-members of the Congregational Church, to hold citizenship and to exercise the privilege of voting. This so alarmed the former New Haven Colony people that they decided to move on to a new territory where they could worship God and conduct the affairs of Government as they saw fit. Accordingly, these people came to this section and founded a society which historians have since termed "the last attempt to found a Theocracy in America".

These people were a religious people. On September 10, 1668 their first minister was settled. An agreement for his support stipulated that he would receive "80 pounds a year," the same to be paid in various kinds of commodities, including a pound of butter for every milch cow in town, a house (as part of the salary), his well was to be dug by the town, he was free from all common rates, and the 'Lord's Half-Penny', due to the N.J. proprietors". The name of the first minister for Newark was Rev. Abraham Pierson, who came from Branford, Connecticut and began his work on October 1, 1667.

The first place of worship was built in 1669. It was a 36 ft. square building which stood directly opposite the present "Old First Church". It was a place of worship and a place of business. All religious, civil and military affairs of the city were conducted here for forty years. In back of the church (present Halsey St. area) was the Old Burying Ground. In 1675 the church was made strong in its walls as a defense against the Indians. Dr. Nelson says "the church was the town, and the town was the church".

On July 28, 1669, Rev. Abraham Pierson's son, Abraham Pierson, Jr. was made his father's assistant. The reason for the action was that a congregation at Woodbridge, N.J. had sent a call for the younger man's services. Rev. Abraham Pierson, Jr. became pastor at Newark following the death of his father. In 1692 extensive repairs were made on the church. On December 10, 1696 the parsonage with 200 acres of land was conferred by deed by the N.J. proprietors.

Along towards the year 1700 we find a changing religious temperament. The original people were dying off and a more moderate and less rigid people were coming in. Many of these were inclined towards the Presbyterian form of government, as opposed to the Congregational system. The result was a controversy in the church. Pierson resigned for he favored the Presbyterian system. He went back to New England where he subsequently became the first head of Yale College, until his death in 1707.

In 1716 a record tells us of the formation of the "Mountain Society" which might have been styled the Second Presbyterian Church in later years but which afterwards became the First Church of Orange, Presbyterian. Records are not complete but it must have been in about the year 1719 that the church in Newark became definitely Presbyterian. Henceforth we find records of its sending representatives to the meetings of the Synod of Philadelphia. The Rev. Francis Makemie had done much to bring Presbyterianism to America. His labors in Maryland were extensive in the years 1683 and thereafter. In 1706 the first Presbytery was formed in the city of Philadelphia, and in 1716, the first Synod.

At all events, the church in Newark was Presbyterian by the year 1720. In the year 1787, under the pastorate of Dr. Alexander McWhorter, was built the imposing structure known today as "Old First Church" - Presbyterian of Newark, N.J. This is one of the oldest and finest of church organizations and buildings in the entire state of New Jersey.

In 1734, the Episcopalian church was formed. Col. Josiah Ogden was the moving personality in the formation of this new church. He went into the fields and worked on the Sabbath to save his wheat and as a result a controversy developed concerning the propriety of such action. Finally Col. Ogden and a group of his followers withdrew and formed the new church body.

Presbyterian churches multiplied, as was to be expected. Old First, truly the Mother Church of Presbyterian Churches, as well as the mother church of all church life in Newark, because it carried the previous Congregational tradition, became inadequate to care for the needs of the growing city. In October 1811, Second Presbyterian Church was founded. On June 8, 1824, Third Presbyterian Church was formed. On May 7, 1835, what is now the 13th Avenue Colored Church was founded. It was founded as the First Presbyterian Colored Congregation of the City of Newark. It also carried the name of the "Elm Street" church for a time.

II. This brings us to the period of our own church's organization and we will deal now more specifically with it. We would expect, following natural order, that our church would have been called the "Fourth Presbyterian Church" but it was rather the desire of its organizers to style it the "Central Presbyterian Church" and therefore this name is as it is.

The beginnings of our church are as follows: On January 31, 1837, the Presbytery of Newark convened in the Lecture Room of the First Presbyterian Church. In the forenoon, Charles C. Williams, Calvin Baldwin, Ezra D. Crane, Josephus W. Saunders, and Nathan Hedges appeared and requested the organization of a church to be called the Central Presbyterian Church of Newark. The Presbytery appointed the Rev'ds. Gideon W. Judd, A.D. Eddy, and Selah B. Treat a Committee to organize the church and to "proceed immediately to the discharge of their duty". Presbytery took recess until 2 P.M. during which time the church was organized. In the afternoon session of Presbytery a report was submitted to the effect that the church has been organized with 60 members received by certificate from other churches. Three elders had been duly elected and set apart to their office. Subsequently a call was laid before Rev. Charles Hoover, who had been received from the Presbytery of Elizabethtown earlier in the same day. At 7 P.M. the installation of Rev. Mr. Hoover as pastor took place. Rev. David Magie of Elizabethtown preached the sermon from the text Romans 11:13. Rev. A.D. Eddy presided and gave the charge to the people. Rev. John Ford gave the charge to the people. It may seem that this was a great amount of work to be done in so short a time, but the fact is that much conferring with the sessions of the other churches had gone on before the day of the Presbytery meeting and they were all favorable to the founding of the new church and matters generally were in order well before the time of the meeting. The three elders chosen were James N. Hedden, Charles C. Williams, and Daniel Price. The first Trustees were John Mays, Calvin Baldwin, Ezra D. Crane, Josephus W. Saunders, Nathan Hedges, Frederick B. Pettis and Daniel D. Benjamin. The names of the sixty original members include such names as Saunders, Johnson, Crane and Benton; names known to us today. We can only say that a "good day's work" was done on January 31, 1837 when we consider the number of steps completed.

The next important task was the finding of a suitable place for worship. A Public Hall over a market house was first used, on the corner of Market and Church (now Halsey) Streets. A Session record says that on June 7, 1838, the new church was not yet ready for occupancy. This indicated the plan to leave the Public Hall and settle in a real church building. On August 18, 1838 the session records show that the new building was ready for occupancy. Trustees records show that the congregation had erected and was occupying a "new house of worship". This was a frame structure 80 feet by 40 feet, on a leased lot, 100 feet by 60 feet. It was located on Market Street, between Washington and Halsey Streets. (Thus we have reviewed the first and second locations of the church, viz., the Public Hall and the first erected building, both on Market Street).

At the Communion service on March 17, 1837, the first communion after the church was organized, 64 members were added to the roll. On the first Sabbath of January in 1839, Calvin Baldwin was made an elder. Ezra D. Crane had been elected to the eldership but he refused to accept the office. During the pastorate of Rev. Mr. Hoover, which lasted for three years, 224 people came into the church, 50 of whom came on profession of faith. On December 30, 1839 record is made of the Ladies' ~~Spring~~ Society and its work. On January 12, 1840, the church committee was "instructed to procure a stove for the more effectual warming of the church, and that it be done immediately, and that the said committee use all due economy in said purchase and erection". On May 26, 1842, the following elders were installed: Stephen Gould, and Jonathan Pierson, & On August 8, 1847, Samuel Halsey, Dr. Elias L. Homedieck and Jacob Johnson. Mr. Samuel Halsey and members of his family had an important part in the church in days that followed.

During the pastorate of Rev. George C. Lucas (October 23, 1849-October 4, 1854), the second church edifice was built. The old lot and building was sold and a new lot purchased on Washington Street. This location was between Market and Bank Streets, a site now occupied by the L. Benberger Store. The Trustees to whom was committed the task of superintending this work were Henry C. Messler, Aaron C. Price, William C. Headley, Nehemiah Perry, Thomas Breese, Moses T. Baker and Sylvester H. Moore. The cornerstone of the new building was laid by Rev. G.C. Lucas on July 29, 1851. The dedication took place on January 25, 1853. At the dedication a sermon on "The Distinctive Features of Presbyterianism" was preached by the Rev. Dr. William Adams. Original hymns were sung, Jacob Johnson, an elder of Central Church having written one, which was used as the opening hymn, one was written by a Minister from New York City and two others were written by Abraham Coles, M.D. of Newark.

During the years 1857 and 1858 the church was blessed by the Great Revival spirit that surged over America. In 1857, 45 people were added to the church and in 1858, 79 were added to the church. On November 29, 1861, the Trustees adopted a resolution permitting the ladies to purchase an organ for the use of the church--also it was resolved that no interlude or accompaniment was to be employed in the use of it, excepting the repeating of the last two lines of a verse. A committee was appointed and the organ was purchased and installed. On May 29, 1865 instruction was given the Trustees to buy property north of the church. A mortgage of \$4000. was assumed in order that this purchase might go through. The land bought was next door to the church at 232 Washington Street. The Rev. William T. Zindley, D.D. became pastor in March 10, 1869 and continued in service until December 16, 1888. A parsonage was built in 1868 or 1869. In 1874 the church was repaired and modernized. It had a membership of 230 at this time. The value of the church property was listed at \$75,000. We also note that Mr. Alexander L. Buryan served as Precentor and Mr. G. Everett Halsey as organist.

In 1872 we learn that a church Prayer Meeting was held every Tuesday and a Young People's Prayer Meeting was held every Friday. After a while the Young People's Prayer Meeting was given up, and the other Prayer Meeting remained on Tuesday evening. The great Christian Endeavor movement was begun on February 2, 1881 and a society was organized in Central Presbyterian Church on January 17, 1893. A very fine history of C.E. work in Central Church was prepared by Mr. Lester V. Bird in 1938.

By vote of the congregation, on October 18, 1892, it was decided to remove to Clinton Hill. In some respects the church has been like the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. Its first location was over the Market on Market Street, the second the frame building on the same street, the third the imposing brick church on Washington Street. Its fourth location (and first on Clinton Hill) was in a store on Clinton Avenue near Ridgewood Avenue. The fifth and present location is at Clinton Avenue, Belmont and Madison Avenues. The Sunday School rooms of the present church were built in 1896, the main auditorium being added a few years later. In 1913, the church had a membership of 638 persons. The church has had 14 pastors throughout its history, including the present pastor. It was also supplied by the Rev. Lyman Whitney Allen, D.D., and the Rev. David R. Fraser, D.D., and others.

III. What of the future? We can only see a glorious future, if we desire it. The move to this place from the downtown location was wisely. Another move is unnecessary. The progress and prosperity of First and Second Churches and of the Goodwill Mission downtown is proof that a church or institution can prosper anywhere if we want it to. But we must have courage. We must have the courage in this day of those who were willing in their day to do a thing as drastic as that of moving the church to this present location.

A church to live, if it has any right to live at all, must serve its people. There may have been a time when the provision of preaching services was all that was needed in a church. Today other things are needed also. A soldier once lay suffering on a battlefield. A clergyman came to read from the Bible and comfort him. The man asked that the minister would put his overcoat over him for he was cold. Next he asked for a drink of water. He asked that his hand be more comfortably adjusted. Finally he said, after the minister had done the things he asked: "Now if you have something to read to me and to say to me, go ahead". In this day we cannot preach with our eyes closed. They must be open most assuredly. James tells us: (James 2:15-16). "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" Our Lord has said: Luke 22:27 "I am among you as He that serveth".

We could easily live and be a large, prosperous church, if we want to. If however we want to die, we will die. If we want to live we will live. If we are willing to rally around and get together some \$50,000 and build a parish house and thus build up young people's activities and a Young People's Sunday School Department, then we can live. If we are not willing to do this there is danger that we will die and die quickly. Evangelism is needful always and in addition Institutionalism is needed in churches. A new day has arrived, a day of thought and a need for age-grouping in any and all successful teaching work. Our blessed Lord has said: "In my Father's house are many mansions". Should not the "houses" we build for Christ's work here on earth have provision for many age-groups and types of activity. A church to live in a city location must provide an all-week program.

The church in such a location must become a kind of College. The association of Second Church (Dr. Clee's church) is that it is much like a College. Provision is made for entertainment, dramatics, clubs, societies, gymnasium facilities, bowling, swimming; all such things are available. These are all parts of the "abundant life", and make for healthier, happier, saner, better living. These are much needed, especially in city work. If I enjoy games and exercises then I am a hypocrite if I say they are unnecessary for others. Games are needful in the lives of young people. Right after the Apostles' Creed, I believe in games and constructive sports as a means for building the character of young people.

In conclusion, we decide today. It is not for a people of the past to decide. The responsibility rests on us, NOW. God's Judgement Bar is before us at this very instant. We can almost reach out and touch it.

We have decided in this moment whether the church will go on or fail. We live, prosper, move on or fail, which shall it be? We must decide today. Will we pay the price? It is for us to say.

Phillips Brooks was once asked what subject he would preach on in a church where the building had just burned down, a bad debt hung over it, and in addition there was danger of a bad split in the church. He replied that he would preach his strongest sermon on Foreign Missions in order that the attention of the people might be taken away from themselves. Our need today is for a great offensive move now, soon. We can easily win the day. At the close of the Civil War, General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, who had been a general in the Northern Army decided to go to the South and engage in the task of Reconstruction. His friends laughed at him and told him that the task was absolutely impossible and that he was foolish to begin it. His reply was: "But what is life for anyway but to do the impossible in the Name of Almighty God". This we can do today and thus we will not remove but preserve "the ancient landmarks, which (our) fathers have set".

Notes:

1. (Page 2).

This incident was recorded because the pastor Rev. John E.D. Strome was at one time a member of the church in Woodbridge, N.J.

2. (Page 3).

The names of the sixty original members may be found in "Forty Year Retrospect", A Historical Discourse, by Rev. William T. Findley, D.D., on page 7 in the footnote.

Sermon preached by

John A. P. Strome

on Sunday, January 29, 1939 -

*In some respect a repetition of sermon preached
on Sunday, January 31, 1938.*